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Common sense for boaters

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Since the Clean Water Act was passed in 1973, recreational boaters have been exempt from permit rules regarding incidental rainwater runoff, engine cooling water discharge and bilgewater. In 2006, a California court ruling changed that requirement - meaning that by September of this year the Environmental Protection Agency would have been applying the same permitting rules to recreational boaters as to commercial vessels.

That didn't make sense.

The Clean Boating Act, supported by Rep. Dave Obey, D-Wausau, is keeping the status quo.

"The Clean Water Act was intended to apply to ballast and other discharges from large commercial vessels, not to the incidental runoff from pontoon boats," Obey said.

This doesn't mean that recreational boaters don't have a responsibility to maintain vessels in an environmentally sensitive manner and it shouldn't be confused with local regulations requiring boaters to empty tanks when traveling between lakes to prevent the transfer of invasive species such as Eurasian milfoil. This bill does not get rid of any existing environmental rules - it will still be illegal to discharge plastics and garbage, oil and fuel, and raw sewage into the water.

But the 620,000 recreational boaters in Wisconsin won't have to purchase permits to operate or face large fines for incidental runoff, which would have been foolish and a nightmare to enforce.

In this case, the status quo makes sense.